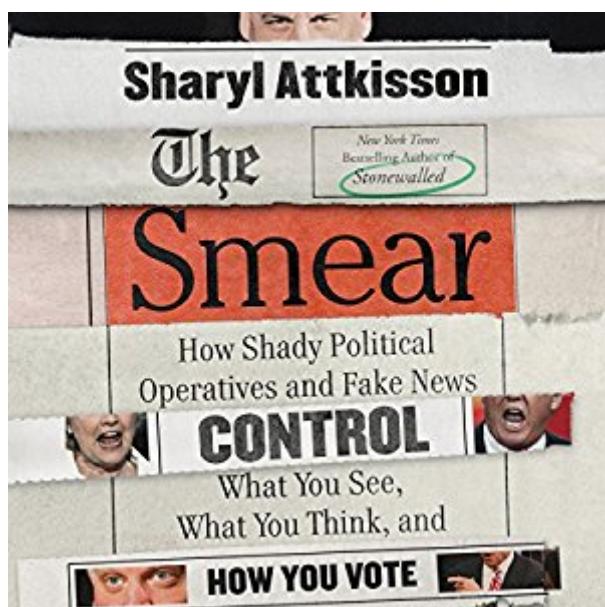


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The Smear: How Shady Political Operatives And Fake News Control What You See, What You Think, And How You Vote



Synopsis

Ever wonder how politics turned into a take-no-prisoners blood sport? The New York Times best-selling author of *Stonewalled* pulls back the curtain on the shady world of opposition research and reveals the dirty tricks those in power use to influence your opinions. Behind most major political stories in the modern era, there is an agenda - an effort by opposition researchers, spin doctors, and outside interests to destroy an idea or a person. The tactic they use is the Smear. Every day, Americans are influenced by the Smear without knowing it. Paid forces cleverly shape virtually every image you cross. Maybe you read that Donald Trump is a racist misogynist or saw someone on the news mocking the Bernie Sanders campaign. The trick of the Smear is that it is often based on some shred of truth, but these media-driven "hit pieces" are designed to obscure the truth. Success hinges on the Smear artist's ability to remain invisible, to make it seem as if their work is neither calculated nor scripted. It must appear to be precisely what it is not. Veteran journalist Sharyl Attkisson has witnessed this practice firsthand. After years of being pitched hit jobs and puff pieces, she's an expert at detecting Smear campaigns. Now, the hard-hitting investigative reporter shares her inside knowledge, revealing how the Smear takes shape and who its perpetrators are - including Clinton confidant Sidney Blumenthal and, most influential of all, "right-wing assassin turned left-wing assassin" (National Review) political operative David Brock and his Media Matters for America empire. Attkisson exposes the diabolical tactics of Smear artists and their outrageous access to the biggest names in political media - operatives who are corrupting the political process and discouraging widespread citizen involvement in our democracy.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The headline above is an actual finding from a Pew Research study. In THE SMEAR, Sharyl Attkisson argues that regular folks are easy targets for false information or smear campaigns: "The public has no idea of the extent to which news is influenced by smear merchants." This situation didn't just happen. It's been a long time coming: "The past two decades have served as an ideal incubator for an industry of smears and fake news." Attkisson documents, in great detail, many of the behind-the-scenes organizations with political agendas. The consumer of news is "pummeled by countless narratives" — some based on grains of truth; others wholly invented for the audience. The author warns news consumers to be cautious even if all the media outlets are parroting the same line: "Today, if enough pundits, operatives, and media parrot the same narrative, it becomes incorporated into the fabric of the news as an accepted fact." And yet, smear campaigns are not new. "They are as old as the Republic: "Our founding fathers knew very well the power of a sharp character assassination . . . Hamilton and Jefferson were planting stuff on each other." It's sex lives. The author documents many smear campaigns originating from both the Left and the Right. She cites the Clarence Thomas hearings as an example of smears from both sides, and also, how one might fight a smear. "The Clarence Thomas Supreme Court nomination showed both sides that the best way to fight a smear might not be to take a defensive posture" — but to mount an offensive countersmear. Attkisson is careful to define what she means by "smear." It's not the dissemination of falsehoods, so much as exaggeration: "Expert smear artists take a sprinkle of truth" — in this case I'm sure it's "objectionable comments" — and pervert it into a weapon of mass destruction to advance a larger goal, often political or financial. Smear campaigns take something that is true and "amplify a misdeed out of proportion." For me, one of the most fascinating sections was the explanation of a variation of smear called "Astroturf." In this

variation, the pros pretend they are ordinary folks: “Paid interests disguised as ordinary people troll assigned topics, news sites, reporters, blogs, and social media for the purpose of posting comments that spin and confuse.” The idea is to “give the impression there is widespread support for or against an agenda when there is not.” Attkisson concludes with this sobering warning: “One thing you can count on is that most every image that crosses your path has been put there for a reason. Nothing happens by accident. What you need to ask yourself is ‘Is it true, but Who wants me to believe it?’ and why?” So all in all, I found *THE SMEAR* to be a solid work, with lots of good points. The author writes extremely well. The topics and chapters are logically presented, making the stories reasonably easy to follow. The author relates many detailed cases on both sides of the political spectrum. Of course, I already knew about many of the tragic stories, but I had no idea of the magnitude of the smear machines.

This book documents political smear campaigns, behind-the-scenes coordination between the press and political campaigns and other special interests, and efforts by our own government to manipulate the news, influence public opinion, and punish whistleblowers. Although some events in the book go back to the 1990’s, most of the information pertains to events of the last ten years, with the emphasis on the 2016 presidential campaign and its aftermath. Those who follow politics closely will not be surprised by Attkisson’s narrative, but some will be surprised by the extent of the shenanigans she describes - the vast scope of media manipulation, the huge sums of money, and the number of people involved. Worst of all, our own government seems to be an active player in much of this. Although smears and media manipulation come from both sides of the political spectrum, more than 80% of what Attkisson describes comes from the left. Among her most serious allegations:

1. Many op-eds that you read on the editorial page are not written by the person whose byline appears beneath them, but by activists working for political campaigns, corporations, and special-interest groups.
2. The Obama Department of Justice and other Obama agencies targeted reporters, stonewalled investigations, and maintained behind-the-scenes relationships with special interests.
3. The federal government creates fake Internet identities to flood social media with propaganda in support of, or against, various policies, media outlets, or individuals. Fake Internet identities are also created by hired consultants and political operatives.
4. In the 2016 presidential campaign, there was back-and-forth collusion between the Clinton campaign, the DNC, and major media outlets.
5. Left-wing consultants and operatives conspire to dig up dirt on conservative media

personalities with the intent of forcing them off the air. Fox News in its entirety has even been targeted.⁶ When you see numerous media outlets use almost the identical language and phrasing to describe a story, it is no accident; they are responding to cues given them by paid political operatives. This book should alert the naïf to the game, confirm the suspicions of the wary, and shame professional journalists. It will NOT shame the spinmeisters and scandal-mongers who earn big money by corrupting politics, journalism, government, corporations, special interests, and the entire fabric of our social media. I give the book four stars instead of five mainly because it is not properly footnoted, a deficiency which critics will no doubt bring up. Sources are usually referenced, but specific footnotes giving actual dates are not provided. I do not doubt the sourcing because I specifically remember many of incidents described by Attkisson when they were first reported, but footnotes would have been helpful. Another quibble is that Attkisson seems to alternate between present and past tense, perhaps because much of the book was written as events were actually unfolding. Finally, the book has what I consider to be some major omissions. Most notably, there is no mention of the "Plamegate" controversy during the Bush administration, when the media conducted a two-year smear campaign of innuendo against the Bush administration even though the media almost certainly knew they were pushing a false narrative.

I've always appreciated Sheryl Attkison's reporting, so was eager to hear her perspective on this subject. She distills in these pages why the voice in the back of your head whispers "hypocrisy", "bias", "coordinated attack". It provides the insight and evidence that we've come to expect in her reporting, and opens the curtains of the smear industry so we might peer in and be prepared to spot when the smear is in play (hint...it's everywhere!). It's like a cipher key to consuming today's media.

Can't say enough good things about this book. Well-written, well-researched, balanced and fair. Whether you are a Republican, Democrat or Independent, this book will open your eyes to the "game" so politics. Attkisson explains the SMEAR in relation to SuperPacs, PR, social media, and the media. Teaches you how to spot the "agenda" behind all news reporting. Her historical perspective explains how media has been infiltrated by "political operatives" who pretend to be objective journalists. Also, explains how to evaluate news as being "fake" or true. Plan to buy several more copies as holiday gifts!

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